

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSK #0431/01 1101048
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 201048Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4264
INFO RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KIEV PRIORITY 3259
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 3431
RUEHRA/AMEMBASSY RIGA PRIORITY 1655
RUEHVL/AMEMBASSY VILNIUS PRIORITY 3654
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW PRIORITY 3306
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1098
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USMISSION USEU PRIORITY 0073

C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 000431

SIPDIS

KIEV FOR USAID
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [INR](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: MILINKEVICH'S WIFE MEETS AMBASSADOR

REF: A. MINSK 395
[1](#)B. MINSK 383
[1](#)C. MINSK 403

Classified By: AMBASSADOR GEORGE KROL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On April 17, Ambassador met with Ten Plus Coalition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich's wife, Inna Kulei, who is the president of the newly formed Committee for the Defense of the Repressed (PCDR). This committee provides educational, employment, humanitarian, and medical assistance to those who were arrested during and following the March 19 presidential elections. In addition to describing PCDR's objectives, Kulei positively assessed the performance and future of the Ten Plus Coalition. Kulei praised the successful organization of the post-election demonstrations and stressed that the Coalition will remain united without the expense and effort of another congress. She conveyed her sympathies for imprisoned presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin's situation, but added that, unlike her husband, Kozulin was not a responsible leader. Kulei downplayed the impact of GOB pressure on her or Milinkevich but noted that the regime threatened to draft her son into the armed services, which would prevent him from continuing his studies in Poland. End Summary.

Newly Formed Committee To Help Election Detainees

[1](#)2. (C) On April 17, Ambassador and DCM met with Ten Plus Coalition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich's wife, Inna Kulei, who is the president of the newly formed Committee for the Defense of the Repressed (PCDR). In response to the massive arrests that followed the March 19 presidential elections, Kulei said that she and leaders from other civil society and human rights organizations, including the Belarusian Association of Journalists and human rights NGO Vyasna, formed PCDR to financially, legally and morally assist the victims of the GOB's repression. PCDR unites and coordinates the activities of a number of new associations that emerged to help those who were detained from March 19-25. Before the presidential campaign, Kulei headed the Belarusian Association of Resource Centers and the Brest Regional Resource Center "Nasha Vezha."

PCDR Helps Expelled Students Continue Their Studies

[1](#)3. (C) Kulei explained that PCDR helps students, who have

been expelled as a result of their participation in the post-Election demonstrations, continue their studies abroad. (Note: Several European universities have agreed to accept students who have been expelled from Belarusian universities for political reasons (ref A).) PCDR facilitates the application process: the expelled student fills out the appropriate enrollment paperwork, writes a statement explaining why they were expelled, and meets with PCDR representatives, who then help place the student in an appropriate foreign university. PCDR has already directed 10 expelled students to Polish universities.

¶4. (C) Kulei claimed that approximately 300 students were jailed from five to 15 days for participating in unsanctioned demonstrations, and now potentially face expulsions or disciplinary actions from their universities. According to Kulei, 20 students demonstrators have been expelled from Belarusian universities. She expects that the number will increase during the summer term when universities will expel more students for "technical reasons."

¶5. (C) Ambassador noted that some civil society leaders informed Emboffs about students who participated in the demonstrations with the intention of getting expelled so they could study in foreign universities for free. Kulei said that while it is not possible to know the motive of every demonstrator, PCDR uses its extensive network of contacts to easily verify whether the student actually participated in the demonstrations. Kulei vouched for the students with whom she has met and spoken extensively as having "authentic" motivations for protesting.

PCDR Provides Employment, Medical and Financial Assistance

¶6. (C) According to Kulei, PCDR has created a system to find new employment opportunities for those activists who lost their jobs as a result of their political activities during and after the elections. PCDR recruits businesses in Belarus and abroad that would be willing to employ those who have been fired for political reasons. PCDR then works with unemployed activists to find appropriate job placements. PCDR also provides job training and arranges internships abroad.

¶7. (C) Kulei told Ambassador that PCDR also distributes humanitarian and financial aid to those in need. Many families of the arrested protesters cannot afford to provide care packages for their imprisoned families members or cannot survive without the income that their arrested family member previously provided. PCDR is working with the Catholic and Protestant churches to provide humanitarian and financial aid, including groceries and rent payments, for these poor families.

¶8. (C) Finally, Kulei explained that PCDR also offers medical, psychological and rehabilitation services to those who were beaten and arrested during the protests. PCDR provides medicine and arranges doctor appointments for them with volunteer specialists.

Coalition Will Hold Together, No Repeat Congress Necessary

¶9. (C) Kulei mentioned to Ambassador that she attended the IRI-hosted opposition discussions on election aftermath in Vilnius on April 14 as the representative of the Vyasna human rights NGO. She claimed the opposition coalition would hold together but needed to transform into a broader movement to include the new people who appeared on and after March 19. She argued against holding a new congress, stressing that the last congress has not yet fulfilled all its resolutions and that another congress would be costly. Kulei conceded, however, that the Ten Plus Coalition leaders need to increase communication and develop a plan of action for the future.

Kozulin is Not a Responsible Leader

¶10. (C) Kulei expressed sympathy for imprisoned opposition leader Aleksandr Kozulin but made clear she did not consider him a responsible leader like her husband. When asked, she rejected Kozulin's claim that she convinced Milinkevich to break his agreement with Kozulin to urge the people to leave the square. Kulei maintained Milinkevich himself decided he could not abandon the people when they told him they would remain on October Square despite impending consequences.

¶11. (C) In a gesture of solidarity, Kulei told Ambassador that she contacted Kozulin's wife, Irina, to invite her to a women's support group for the wives and mothers of imprisoned activists. (Note: During an April 4 meeting with Ambassador, Irina relayed her surprise that Kozulin's opposition "colleagues" were not offering support now that he is a political prisoner (ref B). Irina rebuked Milinkevich in particular, saying he had not once called her to convey his sympathies.)

Demonstrations Were Successful Due to Extensive Planning

¶12. (C) When Ambassador asked if the demonstrations on October Square had occurred spontaneously, Kulei told Ambassador that these demonstrations were the result of carefully orchestrated and executed plans. (Note: Kulei's claim is at odds with the assessment of other Coalition and civil society leaders.) Kulei claimed that 70 percent of the people on October Square came from the regions. Given that information dissemination to the regions is so poor, the large regional participation is likely the result of extensive recruitment by the opposition. Kulei said that although Zubr and Khopit started their information campaigns early, their impact was unclear. Instead, Kulei praised the Belarusian Assembly of Democratic NGOs' "For Freedom" campaign as having been the most effective and visible campaign and cited the "For Freedom" buttons that people wear around town.

Russian FSB in the Tent City?

¶13. (C) When Ambassador inquired about Communist Party Belarusian leader Sergei Kalyakin's statement that the Russian Security Services (FSB) comprised the overwhelming majority of tent city participants on October Square, Kulei dismissed Kalyakin's claim that the encampment was largely a Russian FSB effort to pressure Lukashenko. Kulei added that Kalyakin was ill during the week following the elections and therefore spent little time on October Square. She said that she and Milinkevich spent two days in the tent city and can vouch that Kalyakin's statement is inaccurate, but added, "perhaps he has information."

Free Speech Includes Criticism

¶14. (C) She complained about some in civil society, including political theorist Vladimir Matskevich, who do nothing to promote change except criticize the opposition. She wondered if Post could influence these people to take a more constructive approach. Ambassador indicated one should just get used to the fact there will always be critics, since free speech is an integral part of democracy. Ambassador agreed that there are many that criticize and demand strategies for change while doing little to bring about change, and urged Belarusians to unite around common goals. Kulei said that it was "a big step" for Belarus when people from different places worked together respectfully. Kulei also proudly commented that the number of people who would fight for change and defend their choice has risen significantly after the elections.

Women Leaders' Potential in Public Life

¶15. (C) Ambassador praised Belarusian women activists, saying

that they have the potential to be the country's leaders. Kulei agreed that women leaders are very active and work well together. While she expressed a keen interest in engaging more women in promoting civil society, she admitted it would be hard for Belarusian women to get over their hesitancy to take on active leadership roles in Belarus' male dominated society. She commented that women tend to be more emotional and need to become more "balanced." Kulei expressed gratitude that male leaders seem to have become more willing to accept her as a woman leader.

The Milinkevich Family

¶16. (C) Kulei told Ambassador that her son, who had been arrested on October Square, wanted to return to Poland to continue his studies but the GOB is threatening to draft him into the Belarusian armed forces. Kulei noted the GOB uses this tactic against many young politically active men. (Note: The regime has also repeatedly threatened to draft Zubr activist Nikolai Sasim despite his student and medical waivers, which exempt him from service (ref C).)

¶17. (C) Kulei said that she and Milinkevich are healthy but tired; they plan to take some time off in May. Both Kulei and Milinkevich experience harassment from the GOB, but she dismissed it as more annoying than threatening.

¶18. (C) Kulei also shed more light on her personal background. She told Ambassador that she is a Catholic convert, having earlier been a communist atheist. She also mentioned that she had worked in the Belarusian procuracy, therefore implying that she has a legal education.

Comment

¶19. (C) Kulei is clearly an intelligent, organized and articulate person. Her commanding presence makes it easy to see how people could view her as the force behind the soft-spoken Milinkevich. Kulei's assessment of the status of the Ten Plus Coalition left out many of the criticisms that Post has heard from other contacts associated with the Milinkevich camp. Kulei presented a productive environment with a few outstanding problems, but nothing that her husband could not handle as the Coalition's leader.

Krol